

Sacconi String Quartet

First Prize winners in the Trondheim International String Quartet Competition, the Sacconi Quartet, formed at the Royal College of Music in 2001, is now acknowledged as one of the finest young string quartets in the country.

Last season they made their debuts at both the Wigmore Hall and the Purcell Room, and won the Kurtag Prize at the Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition. The quartet was also awarded first prize in the Royal Overseas League chamber music competition, and is currently giving performances around the UK as part of both the *Tillett Trust Young Artists' Platform* and the *Tunnell Trust* schemes.

The Sacconi Quartet pursues a busy schedule of recitals throughout the UK and Europe. They have performed the Mendelssohn Octet with both the Wihan and Chilingirian Quartets, and have collaborated with the Chilingirian Quartet in a series of quintet, sextet and octet concerts. The quartet has performed for two years running in the Lake District Summer Music festival, where they were assistant coaches to the Chilingirian Quartet and supported by the Ernest Cook Trust Fellowship.

This season the quartet gave two world premières: *Two Studies for String Quartet* by Charles Hart, and a clarinet quintet by Roderick Watkins, performed with clarinettist David Campbell. Earlier in the year the quartet took part for the second time in the International Musicians' Seminar at Prussia Cove, where they studied with Gabor Takacs-Nagy and were supported by the English Speaking Union. They also continue to draw much inspiration from masterclasses with the Wihan Quartet at Pro Corda.

The Sacconi Quartet pursues a keen interest in education work, and has a programme of recitals in London schools in collaboration with the **CAVATINA** Chamber Music Trust. They make regular visits to schools, hospitals and other community venues on behalf of Live Music Now! and the Wigmore Hall, and were Ensemble in Residence on the National Young Pianists' Week in Uppingham.

The quartet is given valuable support by the Musicians' Benevolent Fund, and is sponsored by consultancy firm *m.a.Partners*.

The name *Sacconi Quartet* comes from the outstanding twentieth-century Italian violin maker and restorer Simone Sacconi, whose book *The Secrets of Stradivari* is considered an indispensable reference for violin makers.

The Annual General Meeting will be held here in the church after the concert. All members welcome.

Next Concert: Szymanowski Quartet, Haydn, Dvorak and Szymanowski. Sunday 20 November at 4pm at St. Mary's Church East Bergholt.

Tickets for sale from 3 weeks before each event from Grier & Partners. To book tickets call 01206 298491. For season tickets call 01206 299448.

Stour Valley Arts & Music

Fifty-fifth
season
2005-6

4.00pm
Sunday
16 October
2005

St. Mary's Church
East Bergholt



Sacconi Quartet

Ben Hancox Violin I
Hannah Dawson Violin II
Robin Ashwell Viola
Cara Berridge Cello

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
String Quartet in B flat major, Op 76 No 4
Allegro con spirito
Adagio
Menuetto Allegro
Finale *Allegro ma non troppo*

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
String Quartet in A major, Op. 41 No 3
Andante espressivo
Allegro molto moderato - assai agitato
Adagio molto
Finale *Allegro molto vivace*

INTERVAL

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
String Quartet in E minor, Op 59 No 2
Allegro
Molto Adagio
Allegretto
Finale *Presto*

Programme Notes

In 1797, **Haydn** was sixty-five years old. Two extended visits to England had made him a wealthy man, and he was now the most famous musician in Europe. His position as Esterházy Kapellmeister was far less onerous than before, because Prince Nicolaus II had largely abandoned the country palace at Eszterháza: Haydn's primary duty was to supply a mass each year for the name-day (8 September) of Maria Hermenegild, Nicolaus's consort. The fame and fortune acquired during his London years gave Haydn the status of a culture-hero in Vienna. Many of his remaining works originated in collaboration with the cultural-political establishment and were staged as 'events' of social and ideological as well as musical import. The key figure was Baron van Swieten, the imperial librarian and censor and the resolutely high-minded leader of the *Gesellschaft der Associirten*, an organization of noble patrons who subsidized large-scale performances of oratorios and the like. Haydn's compositional orientation changed fundamentally. He composed little instrumental or orchestral music, but was persuaded by Swieten to begin work on *The Creation*. In support of the Imperial cause, he wrote his 'Emperor's Hymn' – one of the world's great melodies from the moment it left his pen. The only instrumental genre he actively cultivated was the string quartet: Op.76, dedicated to Count Joseph Erdődy, was completed in 1797 and published in 1799. Having contributed nearly eighty works, across almost forty years, to the genre he had himself pioneered, it is no surprise that these pieces show complete mastery of every aspect of quartet writing. No. 4 probably acquired its nickname 'Sunrise' from of the gracefully rising contour of the opening theme, a dreamlike, descending 'mirror image' of which appears a little later on the cello as the second theme. It will appear again, subtly varied by the viola, in the recapitulation. Not the least pleasing feature of this movement is the often ethereal lightness of the textures. The slow movement is a miracle of compression, and of continuously unfolding musical logic: the apparently simple opening motive being eventually presented in *stretto* (versions of it in all parts overlapping each other). The last two movements are necessarily less intense, but each display in full measure Haydn's inimitable *joie de vivre*. The finale is an amalgam of Rondo and Variation forms – the opening theme recurs twice after episodes of other material, but with its details varied each time.

Until he was past thirty, **Schumann** was probably better known as a critic than as a composer, though the situation began to change with the publication of the First Symphony and the Piano Quintet. In 1842, whilst his wife Clara was on tour giving piano recitals, he put himself through exercises in counterpoint and fugue writing, and also began studying the quartets of Mozart and Haydn. Soon he was working on the String Quartets in A minor and F (op. 41 nos. 1 and 2), which were sketched and elaborated as a pair in June and early July. Today's quartet was composed later in July – in just two weeks. As a critic, Schumann made two principal demands of the prospective composer of string quartets. First, the 'proper' quartet style should avoid 'symphonic furore' and aim rather for a

conversational tone in which 'everyone has something to say'. Secondly, the composer must possess an intimate knowledge of the genre's history, but should strive to produce more than mere imitations of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Both aspects of this aesthetic are aptly reflected in Schumann's own quartets, which he proudly described in a letter to Härtel of December 1847 as the best works of his earlier period. They are the only three of his chamber compositions which lack the physical presence of his own instrument, the piano, though its spiritual presence is quite often perceived in the music's melodic shapes and figurations.

The two years beginning in 1806 must be regarded as one of the most prodigiously fertile of **Beethoven's** entire career. A stream of completed works appeared, many of them on the largest scale. In 1806 alone came the three string quartets dedicated to the Russian ambassador Count Rasumovsky, the *Appassionata* Sonata (some of which had been composed earlier), the Fourth Symphony, the Violin Concerto, and in all essentials the Fourth Piano Concerto. They were quickly introduced to the public, and all were enthusiastically received, with the exception of the first two quartets, which were thought 'difficult'. Certainly the musical discourse of the second often has an intensity which is remarkable even for this most serious of composers. All four movements have the same key centre of E (major or minor): something he did only rarely, seemingly with a special purpose. The first movement establishes its key with two brief chords and an opening theme, but immediately contradicts it by repeating the theme a semitone higher. The relationship thus established (which occurs also at the openings of the *Appassionata* sonata and the Op 95 quartet) is exploited in various ways throughout the work. Of the second movement, two of Beethoven's friends testified independently that he had told them that the idea came to him whilst he was gazing at the starlit sky. He is known to have read Kant, and was fond of the philosopher's famous phrase about 'the starry heavens above and the moral law within'. Although not religious in a conventional way, Beethoven associated the heavens with what he called 'the source of all creation'. The third movement (*scherzo*) opens with a restless, brooding quality. Goethe once wrote of Beethoven: 'His talent amazed me, but unhappily his is a character utterly lacking in self-control' – possibly a fair observation about Beethoven the man, but, as Basil Lam drily observes, the music never lacks control, and in any case these quartets are not directed towards social occasions. Each 'Rasumovsky' quartet included a delicate compliment to the dedicatee in the form of a Russian melody: in this case it is the trio section which unveils the '*thème russe*'. During several repetitions, it is presented in a humorous canonic effect – humorous because the theme will not allow the canon to fit together properly. The finale, like that of the Fourth Piano Concerto (written the same year) begins in the 'wrong' key. The driving rhythm of the theme causes an exhilarating build-up of energy as the movement progresses.